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Unsung Hero: ZORAN GRUJIĆ

by Sally Terrell [Mine Action Information Center]

The passion to change the world began humbly for Zoran Grujić with a simple realization that “it would be much better to save people than to kill them.” These powerful words came from a man now regarded as an expert in the field of mine-action information and a hero to the industry, its victims and, most of all, its future.

A resident of present-day Sarajevo, Grujić watched as Yugoslavia grew increasingly unstable and disassembled to become the independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He watched as Bosnia and its neighboring countries broke into the violent Bosnian War in March of 1992, an international conflict between several nations including Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia.

As a citizen, Grujić experienced the horrors of his war-torn country firsthand, and in 1994 he was tired of merely watching the injustices and destruction unfold. Armed with his passion to “save people rather than kill them” and a background in management and engineering, Grujić joined the civil protection unit for unexploded ordnance dismantle and destruction as a pyrotechnician and worked there until the end of the war in December 1995 trying to make a difference.

In July 1996, at the very start of mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Grujić took a data-entry job at the new United Nations Mine Action Center in Bosnia. He was quickly promoted, and before long Grujić became the Chief of Information Technology for Mine Action. His colorful and strong personality, evident to all who encounter him—accompanied by his extensive knowledge of and passion for mine action and his English language proficiency—made Grujić stand out as the perfect candidate to participate in a United Nations’ project for the Mine Action Center. Through this project, he was able to begin working on the creation of the information database system that he regards as the proudest accomplishment of his life and in mine action.

Grujić’s creation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Information System (BHMAIS) has united a multitude of information into a single, organized information system made for and by Bosnians.

Forced to act without a role model (BHMAIS was created 1996 and IMSMA 1999), he and his team created the Bosnia and Herzegovina Information System for Bosnia, focusing on Bosnia’s demining needs and requirements. Later, he recognized the validity of the need for an alternative to the United Nations’ database already in use, the Information Management System for Mine Action or IMSMA, as it had not proven to be as good a solution to the information management issue as it was intended to be. As Grujić explains, one of the biggest challenges in mine action is communicating, translating and uniting all of the information in one place.

The mine-action industry is unique, Grujić explains, because of the concentration of information by such a select group of experts. The challenge is creating a communication and information technology to share this information with each other, across both language and geographic barriers, and to realize that the different people involved have different views on appropriate actions, despite that they are working together on the same team. It is imperative to set mine-action standards in order for all of these experts to work as a global team and continue towards the same goals. “It would be nice to think we are all on the same page,” he continues, “but this is unlikely.”

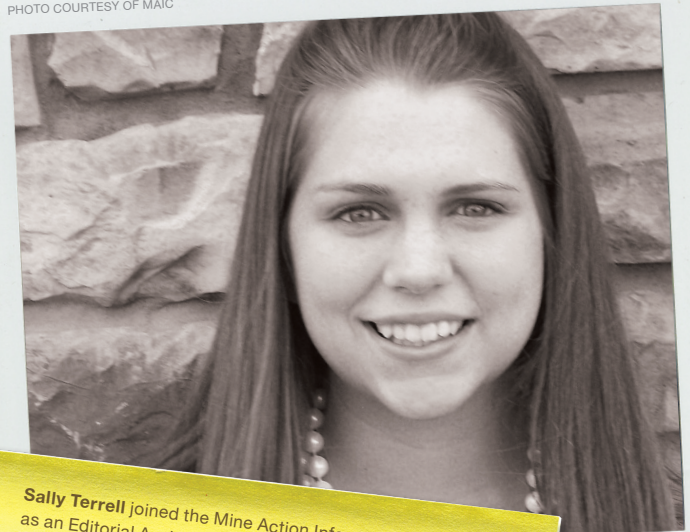


PHOTO COURTESY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA MINE ACTION CENTER.

Grujić’s extensive efforts to standardize and unite information have already made a visible impact on the mine-action community. He thinks the standards will continue to improve as other areas of the mine-action industry get better.

“Mine action will exist for a considerable amount of time,” Grujić says, but with the expertise of heroes like Grujić and his colleagues, and the aid of unified information technology, perhaps there is a new hope. “The real heroes are the deminers,” Grujić says. “All of us, we are just here to be there for them when they need us.” ♦

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAIC



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